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Vermont was a big winner in the latest round of stimulus funding for broadband projects, which USDA announced Wednesday.

Vermont Telephone Co., of Springfield, will receive \$116 million, which, with an additional \$30 million in outside capital, will allow the company to reach every unserved home, business and government building in the state. VTel's Long Term Evolution (LTE), a 4G wireless broadband technology developed by the Third Generation Partnership Project, an industry trade group, will also extend into parts of New York and New Hampshire near the Vermont border.

Vermont's grant was one of the largest single awards given out Wednesday, as USDA announced the \$1.2 billion that will go toward 126 broadband projects in 38 states and Native American tribal areas.

"This stimulus grant ranks among the most promising breakthroughs in rural economic development since rural electrification," said Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., the most senior member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, which has jurisdiction over USDA. "This grant will directly impact the lives of Vermonters today, whether they are hanging fiber, designing the network or getting access to broadband for the first time. This is an investment in Vermont's economy today that will help shape Vermont's economic future."

VTel will use the grant to build the Wireless Open World, or WOW, a wireless Internet system that is expected to reach every home in the state.

According to a USDA press release, the project is expected to reach 130,000 people, 3,750 businesses and 700 community institutions. VTel says the project will directly support at least 1,800 jobs and help drive economic development in the communities for years to come.

The federal money will also help develop a one gigabit fiber network to VTel's existing network.

"At VTel we are deeply grateful and humbled by the scope of the challenge ahead of us," said VTel President Michel Guite. "WOW brings next generation mobile broadband wireless to every one of Vermont's 114,000 unserved residents, making Vermont the first state in America with universal Internet to everyone."

The Recovery Act provided USDA with a total of \$2.5 billion to invest in expanding broadband access to rural parts of America.

Last month Sovernet Communications, a Bellows Falls-based telecommunications company, shared in a \$47.1 million federal grant that will be used to build a 773-mile fiber optic network across the state.

"Together with last month's broadband grants, this award to VTel will help Vermont leapfrog from one of the least connected states to one of the most," said Rep. Peter Welch, D- Vt., and a member of the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Communications, Technology and the Internet.

Sovernet and The Vermont Telecommunication Authority will use the money to build the broadband network which eventually is expected to reach 340 community buildings in Vermont.

The network will then serve as a backbone for other companies to reach the final homes across the rural landscape.

The Sovernet grant, at the time, was the largest single public investment in broadband infrastructure ever made in Vermont.

